

of work.⁵¹ In short, places like Ebeye are the photo negatives of America's technologically thick military-industrial complex.

"The Second Cold War" and Beyond: Diego Garcia

The technological layering that symbolizes the transition to "the second Cold War" is even better illustrated in the waters of the Indian Ocean, midway between Africa and Asia, on the British atoll of Diego Garcia. Situated along oil-shipping lanes in the Chagos Archipelago, this 66-square-mile paradise lies around a large lagoon that is shaped like a footprint on a beach. In November 1968, a contingent of four American geographers, five Filipino technicians, and their cook arrived on Diego Garcia to install a tracking station as a part of the global Satellite Triangulation Program sponsored by the US Department of Defense. The military geographers found a vibrant Creole plantation economy living without electricity, telephones, or postal service, but also an abundance of lobsters that the crew caught in the island's water and preserved in a self-powered freezer to sell to passing ships.⁵² Until then off the electrical grid, the island of Diego Garcia was fully wired within a decade. The island came to host a plethora of ground stations for global systems. It has served as a launch pad for Special Forces for many of their military actions, including the failed 1980 mission to rescue hostages in Iran. It was a base for American B-52 and B-2 bombers in the Gulf War of 1991 and the Iraq War of 2003. Recently, British officials have admitted that Diego Garcia has been one of the CIA's infamous "black holes" where suspected terrorists have disappeared without a legal trace. At least one US ship has been "used as a floating prison for high-profile prisoners while it was in the vicinity of Diego Garcia."⁵³

Like the Bikinis and Kwajalein, Diego Garcia is listed as uninhabited except for its 2,000 military personnel. It has been deliberately constructed as politically empty so that it could be loaded with technologically complex systems. In the early 1960s, in search of suitable sites for its Strategic Island Concept, the US demanded that the British "sweep" and "sanitize" the Chagos Islands. Only then could America turn Diego Garcia into a node in its global power network. The British readily obliged by eliminating any local opposition and expelling over 2,000 residents. To provide the basis for the US-UK agreement, the British government created the legal fiction of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 1965. This arrangement transformed the residents of Diego Garcia—French-speaking British subjects who had worked on the island's coconut plantations for five generations—into temporary contract workers originating from Mauritius and Seychelles. The BIOT scheme, which nullified the Mauritian claim on the Chagos



Figure 2.1

A Diego Garcia coconut worker photographed by a US geographer on the eve of population's removal from the island in 1968. Source: NOAA Geodesy Collection. Courtesy of NOAA, Washington.

Archipelago in exchange for Mauritian independence, paved the way for a US base at Diego Garcia a year later. British policy makers designated the Diego Garcians as “a floating population” of migrant workers before expelling them through a policy of harassment, starvation, and deportation. Residents who left the island for medical reasons or to visit family elsewhere in the archipelago were not allowed to return, for example. The remainder were forcibly removed. Using the exhaust fumes from military vehicles, a manager in the employ of the British killed all the island’s dogs and donkeys. The policy was intended to prevent the residents from claiming that they were an “indigenous population” while keeping them useful as a workforce.⁵⁴ On the eve of their deportation, the last islanders helped incoming American geographers and Filipino technicians to unload kits filled with parts for the global satellite system.

Having removed the island’s native population, the US rapidly began to fill Diego Garcia with technical systems. The Department of Defense, in collaboration with the Coast and Geodetic Survey, established satellite camera observatories as part of a global network to compete with the Soviet Union. In choosing locations for satellite ground stations, government engineers



Figure 2.2

The last Diego Garcians help US engineers to unload the material for the base camp for the Triangulation Satellite Program, 1968. Courtesy of NOAA, Washington.

hewed to political rather than scientific and technological demands. The worldwide satellite triangulation program mapped the shape of the earth using sets of two island stations that photographed satellites against a fixed background of stars. Marketed as a science project, it was strategic from the beginning. The program promised to cover the earth's surface in mathematically perfect triangles. But in execution, the project neatly reflected Cold War political geography by adjusting the global net to the political map. This geographic distribution did not match the scientific maps the agency proudly presented in its public relations campaign. In reality, the points of the triangles faithfully followed the islands under American control, including Maui, Puerto Rico, Guam, Samoa, Tinian, Wake, and the Aleutians. Also mapped were the strategically important territories fading from the grasp of America's reliable allies: British Diego Garcia, St. Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha; Bermuda; French Seychelles; and Australian Christmas Island (now Kiritimati). Touted as a truly global system, the project in fact represented a Cold War geography. For example, the engineers failed to cover the Soviet Union and China because they lacked access to stations needed to complete the triangles.⁵⁵ Moreover, the construction



Figure 2.3

Artist's impression of the US Triangulation Satellite Program suggesting the project covered the earth's surface in mathematically perfect triangles, 1968. Source: NOAA Geodesy Collection. Courtesy of NOAA, Washington.

BC-4 WORLD PRIMARY NETWORK



Figure 2.4

Grounded in islands, a map of the Satellite Triangulation Network as a Cold War reality without perfect triangles and excluding China and the Soviet Union, 1968. Source: NOAA Geodesy Collection. Courtesy of NOAA, Washington.

of the global satellite triangulation system during the 1960s used many of the islands under US jurisdiction as earth stations even when their locations did not make scientific sense or failed to generate the perfect triangles presented publicly.⁵⁶

The satellite triangulation program that brought America to Diego Garcia laid the groundwork for subsequent ground stations of the Echelon spy network, NASA's Mercury Project, and the Global Positioning System, for example. As a node of several global networks, Diego Garcia linked myriad technical systems. For example, the global surveillance system Echelon brought together the British and American systems, personnel, and stations under a secret 1947 agreement. The British Commonwealth countries of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand joined in the American-British network and were followed by Norway, Denmark, Germany, and Turkey.⁵⁷ So, too, Echelon's spy network anchored its ground stations on the islands of Guam, Kunia, Hawaii, Diego Garcia, and the Japanese-controlled Iwakuni. In the late 1950s, NASA's Mercury Project sought to put a man into orbit around the Earth. For its earth stations, the Mercury Project relied on Diego Garcia, Cyprus, Canton, and Enderbury. During the 1970s, the earth links

for the Global Positioning System (GPS) were located on Ascension Island in the Atlantic, Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, and Kwajalein and Hawaii in the Pacific. In each instance, the islands chosen fell in the extraterritorial domain of US jurisdiction and power.

The satellite triangulation program and its many successors were part of American-based espionage, space exploration, and satellite systems thus anchored in an island empire that had come into being over the course of a century.⁵⁸ Again and again, these large Cold War technical networks were grounded in colonized islands in an era of decolonization. In all these projects, satellite systems were linked closely to submarine warfare. Technological systems included ocean acoustics, deep sea bathymetry, and satellite altimetry of sea surfaces.⁵⁹ These complex technopolitical nodes (and their commercial spin-offs) did more than that. They integrated oceans, airways, and outer space into a single system under US global command.

The global networks were not just part of the struggle between the superpowers. The meaning of “the global” varied according to political context of these technological systems. During the 1950s, satellite ground stations outside Western Europe often opened with great fanfare. The stations served both as symbols of American success in the superpower struggle against the Soviet Union and as arguments against British colonialism. Commonwealth nations and decolonizing countries believed that American domination of global networks promised to circumvent the British colonial stranglehold on communication systems and to provide a symbol of national independence.⁶⁰ For their part, the British sought to prolong their empire by subscribing instead to “the global.” In the case of Diego Garcia, for example, the British invested heavily in symbols to claim their sovereignty, issuing commemorative island stamps, flying the Union Jack, arranging a visit by the Duke of York, and preserving old plantation buildings at East Point.⁶¹ The investment in the imperial symbols of British sovereignty could not mask the *de facto* status of Diego Garcia as a US territory, however.

Diego Garcia well represents the Cold War; it also prefigures the post-Cold War world. After its initial buildup in the guise of a communication and geodesic tracking center (1966 and 1973), the tiny island of Diego Garcia became the strategic answer to President Nixon’s search for bases free of political headaches like those associated with Vietnam. By then Diego Garcia served as the US hub for an updated Cold War strategy, the so-called Second Cold War.⁶² The island was the pivot point in the Carter administration’s plan to protect America’s access to Persian Gulf oil after the 1973 oil crisis, the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan, and the hostage crisis in Iran.⁶³ The Reagan administration, which likewise declared Persian Gulf oil

a vital American interest, used the island as a springboard to project American power. In Pentagon doctrine, that projection of power hardened in the design of Diego Garcia as an “empty” island, eventually filled with complex and layered technological systems that spanned the globe.

Diego Garcia, which the Reagan administration called “the footprint of freedom,” has also become the model for future bases. The island transformed into a mobile invasion kit to alleviate the military’s dependence on vast German- and Korean-style US bases or politically instable regimes. The naval kit consisted of the Marine Amphibious Brigade: seventeen fully loaded vessels, including cargo ships that were “packed with all the supplies needed for a Middle East invasion, already loaded into trucks. Everything right down to water tankers for thirsty troops.”⁶⁴ The principle of the kit—a mobile self-sustaining system for a limited time—was to provide enough supplies and spare parts to allow the integrated naval and air unit to operate for 90 days without external support. Flexible, integrated naval and air kits were designed to roll out a complete war machine within days. Military planners designed these war kits to eliminate the dependence on local politics and geography altogether. Diego Garcia became the model. Although these mobile kits, in combination with long-range flight, airborne refueling, and massive aircraft carriers, seemed to signal the end of the usefulness of the geographical positions of islands like Diego Garcia as anchor points for US power, nothing is further from the truth.

Islands as Boundary Objects of the Networked Empire

Islands went through careers of sorts. Once technologically useful, they lay dormant at times before being pressed into use for novel exploits.⁶⁵ For example, the nineteenth-century geographic logic that demanded a chain of island coaling stations became obsolete when the US Navy turned to oil for power. Samoa became a backwater.⁶⁶ Midway and Guam, used as landfalls for underwater cables during World War I, lost out to radio soon after.⁶⁷ The advent of air power changed the geographic logic once again. Guam and Midway were re-enlisted as stepping stones for civilian and military air travel during World War II. The coming of long-range flight, airborne refueling, and massive aircraft carriers threatened to render the Azores obsolete as a transatlantic stopover. The logical conclusion came when the Reagan administration launched a shipbuilding program to free the US of military bases tied to territories by developing units that could roll out as an invasion kit. Even though in each instance the technical and geographic logics changed, the political rationales for keeping islands within the US orbit remained remarkably stable over the course of